

REL Southwest Ask A REL Response

September 2021

Question:

What are strategies for culturally responsive virtual instruction/digital learning?

Response:

Thank you for the questions you submitted to our REL Reference Desk. We have prepared the following memo with research references to help answer your questions. For each reference, we provide an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the study's author or publisher. Following an established Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest research protocol, we conducted a search for research reports as well as descriptive study articles on culturally responsive virtual instruction/digital learning.

We have not evaluated the quality of references and the resources provided in this response. We offer them only for your reference. Also, we searched the references in the response from the most commonly used resources of research, but they are not comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References provided are listed in sections with sources in each section in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. We do not include sources that are not freely available to the requestor.

Research References

Bullock, D. K. (2015). The integration of culturally relevant pedagogy and project-based learning in a blended environment. In T. L. Heafner, H. Hartshorne, & T. Petty (Eds.), *Exploring the effectiveness of online education in K-12 environments* (pp. 359–384). IGI Global. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED564023>. Retrieved from <https://1lib.us/book/2565945/8156e3?id=2565945>

From the abstract: “The use of blended learning environments is rapidly expanding in education. This chapter examines a teacher’s enactment of the New Tech Network educational model, which utilizes a blended learning environment, and the teaching strategies she used to engage students and gauge student achievement. Detailed teacher interviews, classroom observations, and analyses of student assignments were the sources of data for the study. The findings centered on the integration of culturally relevant pedagogy and authentic instruction within this learning environment and the implications of this integration. Recommendations for future research include a more expansive study

of the use of blended learning in social studies and different means of integrating culturally relevant pedagogy and authentic instruction into blended learning.”

Lawrence, A. (2020). Teaching as dialogue: An emerging model of culturally responsive online pedagogy. *Journal of Online Learning Research*, 6(1), 5–33.
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1254071>

From the ERIC abstract: “Despite the preponderance of online learning in K-12 public schools, still little is known about what constitutes good online teaching. The purpose of this interpretivist investigation was to learn about some of the ways in which culturally responsive teaching occurs online. This study focused on the practices of four full-time online high school teachers. Using the methods of grounded theory research, the author analyzed data generated through observations of online courses, interviews with teachers, and teacher-written narratives in order to learn how four instructors practiced culturally responsive online pedagogy in one state-supported online program. Results indicated that the teachers engaged in frequent and ongoing dialogue with their students. The teachers used multiple strategies to get to know their students, to build class community, to adapt instruction to students’ learning needs and preferences, and to make learning relevant. Teachers also discussed contextual factors that impacted their practice. However, some characteristics of culturally responsive pedagogy, including infusing students’ cultures into the curriculum and helping students to challenge power and hegemony were not identified.”

Nash, C. (2015). Best pedagogical practices for acknowledging and accommodating diversity in online courses. In T. L. Heafner, H. Hartshorne, & T. Petty (Eds.), *Exploring the effectiveness of online education in K-12 environments* (pp. 342–358). IGI Global.
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED564023>. Retrieved from
<https://1lib.us/book/2565945/8156e3?id=2565945>

From the abstract: “This chapter examines the best practices for acknowledging and accommodating diversity in online courses, focused at the K-12 level. It presents the challenges of a culturally biased Internet and offers possibilities for educators to address this bias, not only for themselves as pedagogical and instructional designers but also for their students in both online and blended learning environments. While understanding cultural learning biases is important in any online education setting, teachers at the K-12 level need to be especially vigilant as they are working with students who are still developing their own identities as both people and learners. Strategies recommended include, but are not limited to, being aware of cultural differences through both information gathering and experience; providing opportunities for communication that honor student learning preferences; providing explicit course guidelines, expectations, and extended descriptions of course assignments; addressing the implementation of collaborative work with students of diverse backgrounds; and promoting student’s cultural awareness through content and instruction.”

Additional Organizations to Consult

Learning Forward: *The Learning Professional* – <https://learningforward.org/the-learning-professional/>

From the website: “*The Learning Professional* (formerly JSD) is the flagship publication of Learning Forward. The magazine is published six times a year and is included in all categories of membership in Learning Forward. Learning Forward members are able to download all articles at no charge. A limited number of articles are available to the public. Issues can also be purchased in our online bookstore. Learning Forward is the only association focused solely on the most critical lever in improving schools -- building the knowledge and skills of educators. Through the Standards for Professional Learning, Learning Forward leads the field in understanding what links professional learning to improved student achievement. We assist classroom, school, and system leaders in solving their toughest problems of practice.”

REL Southwest note: *The Learning Professional* has one article relevant to this request:

- Summers, L. L. (2020). The right blend: SEL skills support teacher learning in person and online. *Learning Professional*, 41(4), 32–36. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1264691>. Retrieved from https://bettereducate.com/uploads/file/47595_therightblendpdf_therightblend.pdf

Regional Educational Laboratory Mid-Atlantic Blog – <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midatlantic/app/Blog>

From the website: “REL Mid-Atlantic works in partnership with school districts, state departments of education, and others to use data and research to improve academic outcomes for students.... RElevant: Viewpoints and Findings from the REL Mid-Atlantic. Welcome to the REL Mid-Atlantic Blog, where you can find stories about our partnerships, projects, priority areas, and more.”

REL Southwest note: REL Mid-Atlantic collaborated with REL Pacific to prepare a three-part blog post series “examining equity and culturally responsive practices in light of COVID-19.” The three blog posts are as follows:

- [Using Culturally Responsive Practices to Foster Learning During School Closures: Challenges and Opportunities for Equity.](#)
- [Culturally Responsive Leading and Learning: Addressing Equity Through Student and Family Voice.](#)
- [Three Steps for Using Culturally Responsive Practices to Support Equity During Remote Learning.](#)

Training and Advisory Services Equity Assistance Centers, U.S. Department of Education – <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/equitycenters/contacts.html>

From the website: “The 4 Equity Assistance Centers (EAC) are funded by the U.S. Department of Education under Title IV of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. They provide

assistance in the areas of race, gender, national origin, and religion to public school districts to promote equal educational opportunities.”

REL Southwest notes: Websites for the four EACs are as follows:

- Region I – <https://cee-maec.org/>
- Region II – <http://www.idra.org/>
- Region III – <https://greatlakesequity.org/>
- Region IV – <https://msudenver.edu/weeac/>

Region III provides the following relevant resources:

- [Inequities in Online Classrooms: How Do We Bridge the Distance \(Learning\)?](#)
- [Virtual Realities: Equity Considerations for Online & Distance Learning.](#)
- [\(Re\)Imagining School Policy & Practice: Virtual Schooling.](#)
- [Shifting from Surveillance and Control in Virtual Learning Environments: Utilizing Principles of Universal Design for Learning & Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy.](#)

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- (“culturally responsive” or “culturally relevant” OR “cultural relevance” OR equitable OR “cultural responsiveness”)
- AND
- (“virtual learning” OR “virtual instruction” OR “virtual classrooms” OR “virtual school” OR “digital learning” OR “online learning” OR “e-learning”)

Databases and Resources

We searched [ERIC](#) for relevant, peer-reviewed research references. ERIC is a free online library of more than 1.8 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Additionally, we searched the [What Works Clearinghouse](#).

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

When we were searching and reviewing resources, we considered the following criteria:

- *Date of the publication:* References and resources published from 2007 to present were included in the search and review.
- *Search priorities of reference sources:* Search priority is given to study reports, briefs, and other documents that are published and/or reviewed by IES and other federal or federally funded organizations, academic databases, including ERIC, EBSCO databases, JSTOR database, PsychInfo, PsychArticle, and Google Scholar.

- *Methodology*: The following methodological priorities/considerations were given in the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized control trials, quasi-experiments, correlational studies, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, mixed methods analyses, and so forth; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected, and so forth), study duration, and so forth; and (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, and so forth.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by stakeholders in the Southwest Region (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest at AIR. This memorandum was prepared by REL Southwest under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-91990018C0002, administered by AIR. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.